**Title**

**Severe Weather Emergency Response Procedure**

**Document #**
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**Initial Approval Date**
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October 31, 2014

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If you have any questions or comments regarding the information in this protocol, please contact Emergency/Disaster Management at emergencydisaster.management@albertahealthservices.ca.

**Purpose**

The Severe Weather Response Procedure details the actions to be taken by staff and physicians to ensure the safety of themselves, their patients and visitors in the event of severe weather.

**Applicability**

The Severe Weather Response Procedure applies to all personnel.

**Activation**

The Severe Weather Response Procedure can be initiated by any member of staff or physician by following the algorithm at Appendix 1. The order in which notification occurs will depend on the degree of danger and the particular circumstances of the situation. Severe weather-specific responses are at Appendices 2 - 7.

**Post Incident Actions**

For a facility impacted by a severe weather event, the manager in charge is to:

- Assess for injuries and facility damage.
- Implement subsequent emergency response plans as appropriate.
- Complete incident documentation as follows:
  - Reportable Incident Form (seniors’ sites).
  - Urgent Notification of an Emerging Issue (all other sites).
  - Other site or zone-specific documentation as appropriate.
Advice on document completion may be sought from zone Emergency/Disaster Management staff or from the Local Administrator On-call (evenings and weekends). Zone Emergency/Disaster Management staff may also be contacted for assistance in facilitating the post incident debriefing.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Designated Shelter Area** - A below grade or internal room or hallway without windows designated as a shelter area during a tornado warning. *(Shelter Areas not yet designated; signs not yet installed)*

**Warning** - Issued when an identifiable severe weather event is imminent or is already confirmed as occurring. The lead time will rarely exceed 10 minutes.

**Watch** - Issued when conditions are favourable for the development of an identifiable severe weather event although there is still considerable forecast uncertainty. The lead time will rarely exceed 3 hours.

**Lead Time** - The period of time between the issuance of a severe weather bulletin for an area and the onset of the described weather conditions.

**Severe Thunderstorm** - Issued when one or more of the following occurs: wind gusts ≥ 90 km/h; hail ≥ 2 centimetres in diameter; rainfall ≥ 50mm within 1 hour

**Severe Wind** - Issued when sustained wind speeds ≥ 70 km/h and/or wind gusts ≥ 90 km/h (≥ 80km/h and/or ≥100km/h for western part of South Zone including Lethbridge)

**Severe Wind Chill** - Issued when winds ≥ 15km/h lasting ≥ 3 hours will give a wind chill ≤ -40C

**Extreme Heat** – To be defined. A provincial working group led by the Chief MOH is currently studying this issue.
SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROCEDURE

TITLE
SEVERE WEATHER RESPONSE PROCEDURE

PRACTICE SUPPORT DOCUMENT - PROTOCOL

EFFECTIVE DATE
October 31, 2012

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SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROCEDURE ALGORITHM

Appendix 1

Staff Member becomes Aware of Severe Weather

Assess threat

Imminent Tornado Strike

Yes → Appendix 2

No

Notify Charge Nurse or Unit Supervisor

Appendix 2

Charge Nurse or Unit Supervisor

Notify Site Manager or Designate

Appendices 3 – 7 as appropriate → Account for all staff, patients, clients and visitors

Site Manager or Designate

• Obtain additional information from Environment Canada if possible
• Assess the seriousness of the hazard and potential impact on patients and staff
• Remain vigilant for deteriorating weather conditions
• Appendices 3 - 7 as appropriate

Consult with Admin On-Call to determine:
• Need to open a site command post
• Need to request support from ZEOC
• Whether overhead page is appropriate

Call ______ to notify Switchboard / Designate and request announcement of the appropriate Severe Weather Alert message as required.

Continue to provide updates to Switchboard as information becomes available and / or when to announce All Clear

Admin On-Call

• Provide support to Site Manager or Designate
• Activate ZEOC in consultation with ZEL and E/DM
• Assume role of Incident Commander until ZEOC established.
• Ensure other facilities and AHS staff in the community that may be threatened by severe weather have been notified

Switchboard Operator / Designate

Announce “type of severe weather alert” 3X via overhead paging or other means

Announce, “Severe Weather Alert – All Clear” when requested by Site Manager or Designate

All Staff Members

• Return to your work area if safe to do so and as directed
• Implement Appendices 3 – 7 as appropriate and / or other actions as directed by Charge Nurse or Unit Supervisor
• If conditions are unsafe to return to your work area, report to designated meeting point or muster location

• Listen for updates and additional instructions
• Do not phone Switchboard. Updates will be provided as available

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Appendix 2

TORNADO WITHOUT PRIOR WARNING

- Shout warning to patients, visitors and other staff in immediate vicinity to alert them to imminent tornado.

- **GET IN**
  - If outside, get inside a sturdy building.
  - If unable to get inside, lie flat in a ditch or hollow and cover your head.
  - If driving, **do not** try to outrun the tornado; exit the vehicle and lie flat in a ditch or hollow away from your vehicle (to reduce the chance of the car rolling on you) and cover your head.

- **GET DOWN**
  - If inside, get into a basement or inner hallway or room.
  - To the lowest floor in a multi-story building.
  - On the floor, preferably under solid furniture.

- **GET COVERED**
  - With pillows, blankets or mattresses to protect yourself from flying debris.
    - Cover your head with your arms if nothing else is available.
Appendix 3

TORNADO WARNING

- Move ambulatory patients, residents, visitors and staff to the designated Shelter Area (Shelter Areas not yet designated; signs not yet installed)
  - Take weather radio and phone.
  - Take essential medical equipment and charts if time permits.

- For all others, move them to an inner, windowless room or hallway.
  - Provide chairs or soft materials to sit on.
  - Close patient room doors and fire doors.

- For patients who cannot be removed from their rooms:
  - Lower the bed as far as possible.
  - Move them as far away from windows and skylights as possible.
  - Cover them with blankets and pillows to protect them from flying debris.
  - Draw curtains and drapes.

- Listen to the weather radio and other media for weather updates.

Appendix 4

TORNADO WATCH

- Ensure weather radio is functioning.

- Tune in to local radio/television station (be aware that satellite stations may not carry local weather warnings).

- Monitor Environment Canada’s weather warning webpage at http://www.weatheroffice.gc.ca/warnings/warnings_e.html

- Frequently observe weather conditions.
Appendix 5

SEVERE THUNDERSTORM / WIND

- Bring patients indoors and have them remain there until the severe weather passes (30 minutes following the last report of thunder).
- Close and secure all windows.
- Discourage visitors from leaving buildings until severe weather has passed.
- Advise patients, residents, staff and visitors to stay away from windows, skylights and exterior walls. Avoid rooms with large windows.
- Occupants of buildings that offer little severe weather protection (portable or manufactured steel buildings) should evacuate immediately to a nearby, well constructed building if this can be accomplished safely. If severe weather is already in progress follow ‘Tornado Without Prior Warning’ actions as appropriate.
- If time and safety permit, ensure that objects that may become airborne missiles in high winds are safely secured or brought inside. Do not send staff out into storm conditions to secure objects.
- If you must exit the building, use a door on the leeward side or in a sheltered area. Maintain a tight grip on the door and ensure that it latches behind you.
Appendix 6

**SEVERE WIND CHILL**

- Identify those clients, staff and visitors most at risk from severe cold-related injury including:
  - The elderly.
  - Those with peripheral circulatory compromise (e.g., diabetes).
  - Those with cognitive impairments or under the influence of drugs/alcohol.
  - Outdoor workers.

- Stay inside or carefully limit time spent out of doors.

- If required to be out of doors, dress appropriately for the conditions.

- When travelling:
  - Carry a fully-charged cell phone.
  - Advise supervisor or contact of your route of travel and ETA.

Appendix 7

**EXTREME HEAT**

Provincial working group led by Chief MOH currently studying this issue. Actions to be completed once working group has concluded its task.